

# ACT I

## Scene One

*(The scene is the living room of the Condomines' house in Kent. The room is light, attractive and comfortably furnished. On the left there are French windows opening onto the garden. On the right there is an open fireplace. At the back there are double doors leading to the hall, the dining room, the stairs, and the servants' quarters.)*

*(Light Cue No. 01, Act I, Scene One.)*

*(When the curtain rises it is about eight o'clock on a summer evening. There is a wood fire burning because it is an English summer evening. The doors are open, the windows are closed. The curtains are partially closed.)*

*(EDITH comes in from the hall carrying, rather uneasily, a large tray of cocktail things. She comes to the center table with the tray of drinks. She sees there is no room, so puts it on the drinks table upstage right with a sigh of relief.)*

*(RUTH enters center briskly. She is a smart-looking woman in the middle thirties. She is dressed for dinner, but not elaborately.)*

**RUTH.** That's right, Edith.

**EDITH.** Yes'm.

RUTH. Now you'd better fetch the ice bucket.

EDITH. Yes'm.

RUTH. (*Arranging the ornaments on the piano.*) Did you manage to get the ice out of those little tin trays?

EDITH. Yes'm - I 'ad a bit of a struggle though - but it's all right.

RUTH. And you filled the little trays up again with water?

EDITH. Yes'm.

RUTH. (*Moving to the window and arranging the curtains.*) Very good, Edith - you're making giant strides.

EDITH. Yes'm.

RUTH. Madame Arcati, Mrs. Bradman and I will have our coffee in here after dinner, and Mr. Condomine and Doctor Bradman will have theirs in the dining room - is that quite clear?

EDITH. Yes'm.

RUTH. And when you're serving dinner, Edith, try to remember to do it calmly and methodically.

EDITH. Yes'm.

RUTH. As you are not in the Navy, it is unnecessary to do everything at the double.

EDITH. Very good, 'm.

RUTH. Now go and get the ice.

EDITH. (*Straining at the leash.*) Yes'm.

(*She starts off at full speed.*)

RUTH. Not at a run, Edith.

EDITH. (*Slowing down.*) Yes'm.

(EDITH goes.)

(RUTH crosses to the fireplace and then gives a comprehensive glance round the room.)

(CHARLES comes in center and moves to the back of the sofa. He is a nice-looking man of about forty, wearing a loose-fitting velvet smoking jacket.)

**CHARLES.** No sign of the advancing hordes?

**RUTH.** Not yet.

**CHARLES.** (*Moving to the drinks table; going to the cocktail tray.*) No ice.

**RUTH.** It's coming. I've been trying to discourage Edith from being quite so fleet of foot. You mustn't mind if everything is a little slow motion tonight.

**CHARLES.** (*Coming to left of RUTH, above the sofa.*) I shall welcome it. The last few days have been extremely agitating. What do you suppose induced Agnes to leave us and go and get married?

**RUTH.** The reason was becoming increasingly obvious, dear.

**CHARLES.** Yes, but in these days nobody thinks anything of that sort of thing. She could have popped into the cottage hospital, had it, and popped out again.

**RUTH.** Her social life would have been seriously undermined.

**CHARLES.** (*Moving to the drinks table again.*) We must keep Edith in the house more.

(*EDITH comes in slowly with the ice bucket.*)

**RUTH.** That's right, Edith. Put it down on the table.

**EDITH.** (*Putting the ice bucket on the drinks table - upstage right.*) Yes'm.

**CHARLES.** I left my cigarette case on my dressing table, Edith. Would you get it for me?

**EDITH.** Yes, sir.

(*EDITH runs out of the room.*)

**CHARLES.** There now!

**RUTH.** You took her by surprise.

**CHARLES.** (*At the cocktail table.*) A dry martini, I think, don't you?

(*RUTH takes a cigarette from the box on the mantelpiece and lights it, then she crosses and sits in the armchair. CHARLES is mixing cocktails.*)